

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 4252

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, EC
SUBJECT: MILITARY WARNS AGAINST POLITICAL ATTACKS ON THE
MILITARY'S HONOR

REF: QUITO 4166

1. THE COUNCIL OF GENERAL OFFICERS OF THE ECUADOREAN ARMED FORCES ANNOUNCED THAT IT HAD HELD A CONFIDENTIAL SESSION JUNE 20, WITH THE THREE MEMBERS OF THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENT IN ATTENDANCE, IN WHICH IT FORMALLY RESOLVED TO "REJECT" THE ATTACKS BEING MADE BY CIVILIAN POLITICIANS AGAINST THE ARMED FORCES, AND TO ADOPT "THE MEASURES NECESSARY TO DEFEND MILITARY HONOR."

2. THE RESOLUTION OF COUNCIL DERIVES FROM THE RECENT COMMENTS OF LIBERAL PARTY CAMPAIGN DIRECTOR PEDRO JOSE ARTETA (IN WHICH HE QUESTIONED THE HONESTY OF SUPREME COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENT MEMBER GEN. GUILLERMO DURAN ARCENTALES) AND FROM STRONG PUBLIC CRITICISM BY POLITICIANS OF HIS SUBSEQUENT DETENTION AND IMPRISONMENT.

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3. THE RELEASE OF THE COUNCIL'S COMMUNIQUE COINCIDED WITH A MEETING OF THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL AND THE HEADS OF MOST OF ECUADOR'S 14 LEGALLY RECOGNIZED POLITICAL PARTIES FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING REFORMS IN THE MECHANICS FOR VOTING. THE POLITICAL LEADERS, STILL IN HIGH DUDGEON FOLLOWING ARTETA'S ARREST, DEMANDED IN THE MEETING THAT THE GOE REESTABLISH HABEAS CORPUS AND

ALLOW COMPLETE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION. THE POLITICIANS
PROTESTED THE MILITARY'S WARNING, SAYING THAT THE
COUNTRY SHOULD NOT REMAIN AT THE MERCY OF SUBJECTIVE
DECISIONS OF THE ARMED FORCES.

4. COMMENT: REACTION BY POLITICIANS TO THE COMMUNIQUE HAS
BEEN UNIVERSALLY NEGATIVE, AS COULD BE EXPECTED. MOST
CANDIDATES HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR CONCERN AND REJECTED THE
VIEW THAT THERE SHOULD BE IMPLICIT RESTRICTIONS
UPON THEIR COMMENTARY IN THE CAMPAIGN. THEY ACCUSE THE
MILITARY OF OVER-REACTION AND DENY THAT ANY POLITICIAN
HAS MADE PERSONAL ATTACKS AGAINST MILITARY OFFICERS. BORJA
AND CALDERON, FOR EXAMPLE, COMMENTED THAT ANY GOVERNMENT
SHOULD BE ABLE TO ACCEPT HONEST CRITICISM AND SAID THEY
WOULD CONTINUE TO CRITICIZE THEIR GOVERNMENT WHEN THEY BELIEVED
SUCH CRITICISM WAS MERITED.

5. IN CONVERSATIONS WITH POLITICIANS DURING JUNE 21,
EMBOFFS COULD DISCERN CONCERN ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE MILITARY'S COMMUNIQUE FOR BOTH THE SHORT AND LONG
TERM. THE OBVIOUS SHORT TERM WORRY IS THAT THE
CURRENT CAMPAIGN CANNOT BE CONDUCTED AS FREELY AS HOPED
BECAUSE OF THIS SUBJECTIVE MILITARY SWORD OF DAMOCLES
HANGING OVER POLITICIANS' HEADS; IT APPEARS THAT THE
MILITARY LEADERSHIP IS CURRENTLY UNWILLING TO ALLOW
CRITICISM OF THE ARMED FORCES OR OF INDIVIDUAL OFFICERS
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TO APPEAR AS A CAMPAIGN ISSUE.

6. MOST ECUADOREAN POLITICIANS, HOWEVER, DO NOT WORRY
ABOUT SPENDING A COUPLE OF DAYS IN JAIL. SOME EVEN
REGARD IT AS A POLITICAL PLUS. THEY ARE MORE PREOCCUPIED
ABOUT THE LONG-RANGE CONSEQUENCES OF THE COMMUNIQUE AND
OTHER MILITARY MOVES. THE EXTREME IMPLICIT THREAT OF THE
MILITARY COMMUNIQUE IS THAT IF CRITICISM OF THE MILITARY
IS NOT KEPT WITHIN ACCEPTABLE BOUNDS, THERE WILL BE NO
RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE. MOST POLITICIANS, HOWEVER,
APPEAR TO REJECT THIS AS NOT A POSSIBILITY AT THIS STAGE.
THEY SEE, THOUGH, THIS COMMUNIQUE AND OTHER ACTIONS SUCH
AS THE PACKING OF THE SUPREME COURT LAST YEAR AND OBVIOUS
MILITARY INFLUENCE WITHIN THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL
AS EVIDENCE OF THE MILITARY'S ATTEMPT TO MAINTAIN LONG
TERM AND UNPRECEDENTED INFLUENCE OR CONTROL UNDER THE
UPCOMING CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT.
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